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ACROSS THE HILLS

FRANCES MARY OWEN

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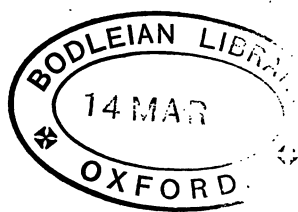
FRANCES MARY OWEN

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P R E F A C E.



"ACROSS the Hills " was written by its author very rapidly, under the influence of a strong impulse. Shortly after it was finished, she herself saw "whatever it is that death has to reveal."

Those who knew and loved her will recognize the unconscious portrait of herself which the story gives, of the richly gifted nature consecrated to high and unselfish ends ; they will also feel mournfully the prophetic foreshadowing of the sudden close of a life lavishly spent in the loving service of others.

To such as accompanied her for a while through her life's brief day, it will seem as if they too were transformed by the vision of that Christ-like sympathy which ever saw, not the "evil face," but the suffering and sadness beneath it, and stretched out a gentle and helpful hand. And others there may be, that knew her not, who will be helped and stimulated by this tale, imaginary yet true.

The author was willing that the story should be offered for publication in some magazine ; it is now perhaps fittest that it should appear, as it here does, alone.

ACROSS THE HILLS.

THE train had broken down at an out-of-the-way station in Wales. Heath-covered hills sloped towards the line, and between them I caught a glimpse of blue moving sea in the distance. It mattered to me very little when I was told that no train would go on for ten hours. I was in search of health, and those heath-covered hills would do for me as well as anything else. There was only one other passenger—a lady, whose quick, springing step and graceful figure told that she was young, and was probably *not* in search of health. The first thing that arrested my attention was the extreme calm of the voice in which she made her inquiries of the solitary porter.

“There is no train till nine o’clock to-night?”

"No."

"How far is Llanfurdy across the hills?"

"Fifteen miles or thereabout."

"There is no conveyance?"

"No, mem, none however."


"Then will you lock up my box in the office here? I must walk to Llanfurdy."

The voice was music itself; no hurry, no agitation, not even a tone of that simple feminine importance assumed in a crisis, which is so amusing to a man accustomed to varied action.

"And the parcel, mem?" said the porter, stretching out his hands for a leathern case which the lady carried—"shall it go with the box?"

"No; I will carry that."

Did she know what she was saying? I wondered. Fifteen miles across steep hills and carrying a leathern despatch-box meant great fatigue. I involuntarily took a step forward; but it was no affair of mine, I thought. Something in that involuntary step, however, vibrated on her sensitive organism, and she turned and looked at me. Never had I seen, never shall



I see, such another face as that. It was calm and pale, with large grey eyes looking out from it. But that tells nothing. The calm of that face was the calm of one who had nothing new left to suffer ; the light of those grey eyes was a light which had been lit from within. They were strange magnetic eyes ; the sensitive mouth and nose and chin were all dominated by them. The rich hair, which waved low over a broad forehead, was lifted lightly by the breeze which was blowing, and showed the strength of the white brow beneath it. As she looked towards me, a very slight colour rose in her cheeks, and I could see that she recognized me, for my life was a public one.

"Mr. H. S——?" she said, half to herself.

I am a shy man, but some power stronger than my own will impelled me forward. I lifted my hat.

"This is an awkward breakdown, and puts you to much greater inconvenience than it does me," I said.

"Yes," she answered, with a frank, bright smile ; "it is very inconvenient indeed to me. I must get to Llanfurdy before nightfall."

"And you are really going to walk?"

"Yes; there is no help for it."

"And carry that case?"

"Yes; the case is more important than I am."

I hesitated for a moment; then, again impelled by some strong attraction, and in spite of my own nature, I said, "My name is H. S——. Will you allow me to carry that case for you and assist you in finding your way across the hills? I shall be able to catch some train to-night; I have nothing to do here till then. It would be a real pleasure to me."

She looked at me for a moment scrutinizingly, and then said, "I believe it would be really a pleasure to you to do anything to help another. Yes; I shall be most grateful. I knew directly who you were."

She made some little change in her dress in the small booking-office—laid aside a heavy travelling-cloak, and showed a close-fitting serge dress of a dark colour, and she put on a soft hat matching it, and was ready.

I took up the leather case and started beside her, smiling to myself a little at this sudden

adventure. We quickly left behind us the way-side station, and the brown trout stream which brawled past it, and began to mount the hills almost immediately. By degrees we entered into easy conversation. The same wonderful calm was noticeable in the lady's voice; her words were not rapidly formed, but came with musical deliberation. As we glided from one subject to another I felt as if we were entering a new world. She seemed to have thought freshly on many subjects, and to have formed opinions on them, but she was entirely free from the dogmatism of half-educated women, and her expressions were those of suggestion rather than assertion. It was after we had been talking for some time that she broke into a childlike happy laugh, and said—

“There is something very strange in thinking of Mr. H. S—— carrying my despatch-box across these hills! I wonder if I am doing the world most harm or good by allowing it?”

“Good!” I answered decidedly.

“Why?”

“Because you are making me useful.”

“Yes, but——”

I said nothing, waiting for her thought to complete itself.

"Supposing that you get ill—supposing that it tires you and makes you unfit for work?"

"The work is problematic, the present gain is certainty."

"That won't do," she said, laughing; "the greatest good of the greatest number would never come to pass without some measure of faith, nor without letting the certainty go."

She walked on in front of me for a few steps, springing over the heather as though she trod on purple waves.

"Don't you think life chiefly means 'letting go'?" she said, and her voice seemed to come from some inner depth that was sunlit and at rest.

I partly understood, but I wanted her to explain herself, and feigned ignorance. "What do we let go that is worth keeping?" I asked.

We had come to a ragged thorn-bush, blown all to one side, and stretching out long arms as if for pity. I put the leather case down on the heather for a few moments, and began cutting two strong sticks, off which I carefully took the

thorns. I had found one branch with a sort of curled hook which would serve for a handle, and when I had put it into shape, I handed it to her.

“Take a pilgrim staff, lady,” I said.

Again that look of childlike pleasure came with her ready thanks, and she sprang with her new treasure to the top of a hillock near.

Such a view! An inland sea of purple and gold, for the gorse was in blossom too, and woven into wild tapestry with the heather, and the blue hills seemed melting at the presence of the Lord; for the sun, which was near its meridian, was softening all their hard outlines till they blended with bluer sky. I raised my eyes from the beauty around to that one human face which was looking at it, and I saw there a look which made me understand all beauty as I had never done before. I had seen adoration and had only partially sympathized with it. It separated the worshipper so much from that which inspired the worship that it perplexed my thought. If this lady's look had been one of adoration only, I should have missed the harmony which it has left in my

memory for ever, and which could only be expressed by the words, "God saw that it was good." The divinity which was in her, recognized the divinity around her and was glad in it. There was no appeal for sympathy to me. She looked far away as though she were gathering the whole scene into her own being, or slowly diffusing herself through it all; and then she smiled as a butterfly touched her hand on its way across the heather, and she came down the little mound in perfect silence, which for a few minutes I dared not break.

At last I said, "How should you define a sense of beauty?"


"I never could define anything in my life," she laughed.

"But if you had to do it or die?"

"Then I think I should call it recognition."

"Do you mind explaining yourself further?"

"I am not much accustomed to expressing what I mean, but you know the glad thrill which the first sight of snowdrops gives, or a spray of bramble leaves turned crimson in autumn, or a clear running stream, or a hundred things of the kind. It seems to me that thrill



belongs to the deepest, the most real, part of us ; it claims the snowdrops, or the bramble, or the stream as its own ; it is glad of it. Well, it sounds foolish perhaps to attempt to express it by any word we have, but it *loves*."

"And you would not limit this definition to such objects as you have named ?"

"Certainly not. I feel it in the storm, in the mountains, in the sea, in everything that is beautiful to me. It is the reality of me, my true self, the God in me," she added, naming that name as I had never heard it named before, "meeting and recognizing the God in something else, and springing with joy to meet it."

I knew then what her face had meant as she looked across the heather to the hills, and was glad I had understood it.

But she was not going to allow me to explore the depths of her wonderful nature, and with a bright flash, she was soon at the surface again, and we began to discuss politics, a subject dear to my heart. She abjured all parties.

"It just shows what a low stage of development we are in that they should still be found necessary," she said ; and added, smiling, "I

know that's quite crude so far as words go, but it has come to me with the freshness of a new revelation. Like most evils, party feeling develops good, but it is bad in itself, and cannot be lasting."

We passed on to the discussion of poverty and riches, of class distinction and the unequal distribution of property, and each subject in turn seemed touched with a new light to me. I began to feel that I had hitherto known their outside relations, but until now I had not seen their inward realities. I had never before met with any one who seemed to find all service of others, not only the law of life, but the very life itself. It would have been impossible to praise her opinions, they were so entirely spontaneous and so evidently the expression of constant practice. She would have only seemed blankly astonished if I had tried to show her that few had reached her standpoint ; but I began to see a clue to many of the enigmas which had so long perplexed me. I felt that this woman had won for herself a liberty which I had never dreamed of attaining. She was to me an embodiment of life at its highest, and she seemed to have gained

the power of touching vitally the life of others. I walked beside her as one in a dream. I felt as if I were new to myself. Never before had I met any one who had such a power of liberating my own best thoughts. She seemed with every sentence she drew from me to be revealing me to myself, and as if she created thought in me too, of which I had not known myself capable.

At a lonely bend of the wild road between the hills, we met two rough-looking tramps. They came towards us with a threatening aspect. I felt anxious for a moment, and thought with some satisfaction of our thorn sticks. The despatch-box might arouse their covetous desires. They were strong men, two to one, and I looked furtively at the lady, as one of them began in the usual begging whine to demand money. But there was something in her face which seemed to make them uncomfortable. She gave them a small coin—I could see in the slenderly filled purse that there were not many more,—and she said to them kindly—

“You look very tired with this hot day’s walking.”

They mumbled some thanks and passed on.

At a little distance we met another and more sinister-looking man, but he only said "Good day" as he passed, in answer to the bright greeting of the lady.

"An evil face," I remarked.

"A very suffering one," she said sorrowfully. "His foot seemed hurt; it was bleeding." I went on. She started. "I must go back and see."

I remonstrated, but it was of no use. Before I reached the end of an argument which ought to have been conclusive, she had overtaken the tramp.

"You are hurt," she said, pointing to his bleeding foot.

He growled out an ungracious reply.

"I am so sorry," she said simply. "I cannot go on my way happily unless you will let me see if I can help you."

The man looked at her for a moment as a dumb animal might have done; then slowly his eyes grew dim with tears—he was unnerved with pain, and kindness was so new.

"You must sit down a moment on this bank and let me see your foot."

He obeyed like a child, and more in a dream than ever. I saw her take the dusty, wayworn foot up and examine it.

"Yes ; it is cut, and you must have got something into it. We must bathe it ! Come, Mr. S——, we must find some water."

There seemed little prospect of finding any on that parched road between the hills, and I returned from a fruitless search in a few moments. I saw the lady smile a little, and break off a small bough from a bush near, and then walk away on the other side. I had never seen the divining-rod in use before, though I had heard of it, and I watched her intent on the little bough between her long white fingers. Presently it began to tremble violently, and the lady knelt down on some long grass, which she parted eagerly : there was a tiny trickling stream at this spot, and she beckoned the suffering man to limp over to it. She tore her handkerchief in two pieces, soaking one half of it in the water and tenderly and gently washing the wound ; then carefully removing whatever was

fretting it, she bound it up with the rest of the kerchief. The man began to mumble thanks, and I to express astonishment at her expert fingers.

"I have often done it," she said. "I have been with ambulance corps."

"Are you going far?" she asked of the man.

"To N——," he answered, and added, with an oath, "I must be there in time——"

"In time for what?" I demanded.

The man looked at me with a wholly repulsive expression. The lady's goodness had shamed me into a certain amount of sympathy, and I was prepared from my superior height to look upon him with a patronizing forbearance; but he jeered at me. Evidently I could do nothing to help him. I withdrew to a little distance and sat down on a tuft of heather, near enough to aid the lady, if any aid were necessary, but I felt it would not be. I saw her pitying face raised to that evil one. I heard the gentle tone of her voice as she asked a question, though I could not hear her words. I heard the rough tones of his answer, but I knew from her face that he said nothing rude. They talked for

some time, when the lady joined me again. The tramp had begun to limp on his way, but I saw that he had the help of the lady's thorn stick, and her gentle eyes were full of tears.

"He is on a hard errand," she said in a voice which was deeply moved. "He is hurrying to N'— for a farewell sight of his son, who is to be—to be hung on Thursday. It is very pitiful."

We walked on in silence for some time after this adventure. Then I tried to win her from the depression of this sad story by every means in my power, but she came out of the mood into which it had plunged her with an evident effort. By degrees she became interested in conversation, and I then asked her again what she had meant about the "letting go" in life.

"Well, is it not true," she said, "we begin life with such hard-set opinions on almost every subject, with such a possessing grasp of many things; and as we go on we find so much to modify those opinions and to loosen that tight grasp that we are for ever 'letting go'?"

"But it is only what is worthless that we really let go?" I objected.

"I do not think we have the power of judging the relative worth of things."

"But we never let the best go?"

"I would rather say the Best never lets us go," she answered, with a peaceful smile. "I think we are for ever letting our best go to find something better."

"In all things?"

"Yes."

"In the highest?"

"In what we call the highest, as well as the lowest."

"In religion I doubt not it is true," I remarked, as I turned the subject over in my mind. "The dogmas of one's youth are 'let go' as they are found too narrow for one's after thought, and we let go dogma very often to——"

"To lay hold on eternal life," she said joyously. "But take the other matters of life. All personal endeavour must be held fast to be brought to completion."

"Must it? Surely we are constantly throwing out old conclusions and trying new ones. We think nothing can succeed but one way—"

we find that we must let it go before we can make one step of progress! And how often for the sake of others it seems necessary that we should let everything go—even our best, as it seems to us!” she said half to herself.

We had gradually been coming down into a hollow, where a small village nestled. A straggling little street, a pink-washed chapel called “Salem,” a bright rapid stream, a few trees—beech and fir and rowan, with reddening berries,—and an old stone bridge, with a quaint little inn near to it, were no unwelcome sights, for we needed rest and food.

I went into the small inn to order something to be got ready for us, and was detained for a little while by the garrulous landlady. When I came out I found the lady sitting on a pile of felled wood beside the bright stream, with a group of village children around her. The youngest was on her knee, with his curly head nestling in her arms. The others were open-mouthed with astonishment as she told them a fairy tale. She was the most radiant of the party, and I heard her sweet voice ringing out clearly, “And the king was very sad, for the

ogre would only be satisfied with the best one who lived in the village."

I could not interrupt her, she was too much absorbed, so I wandered idly along the stream, the wondering shouts of the children following me for some way. Then I sat down and thought of all the wonderful revelation of that day. I could hardly account to myself for the strange spell which was over me. It seemed to me as though a veil had fallen. Life was flowing through all my veins with joyous throbs. The weariness, the languor of the day before, were forgotten. It seemed to be more than health that had come to me. I was re-vitalized. I had never truly lived before. I had crept along the highway; now, for the first time, the evolution of my life had brought me to walking erect. I felt half ashamed to own to myself that this was the work of a woman whom I had known but a few hours, and yet a growing glory in this new knowledge seemed my strongest feeling. I tried to analyze the fascination that held me, but it baffled me. I had felt alone before; I could never feel alone again. Not only was this wonderful womanhood revealed

to my spirit, but I was revealed to myself, a complex marvel of sympathies and affinities united to all other living creatures by the strongest bonds. All that I had been seemed to me infinitely little, and yet I could not despise it, for it had led me to this. All that I might be lay out in a shining vista before me—a boundless possibility.

As I strolled back by the bright stream towards the inn, she came to meet me, with the children hanging on her skirts, the youngest, who had sat on her knee, now clinging to her hand and dragging her forward.

“They are all going blackberrying, and they would like me to go ; but I cannot,” she said.

“You must have food and rest first,” I pleaded.

“We shall pass the copse where they will be picking as we go on our way. It is there on the side of the hill. Yes, Georgie, we will see how many blackberries you’ve picked !” and she loosed her hand gently from the chubby one which held it and stroked the golden tangle of curls.

“How do you know his name ?” I asked.

"Why, he told me, of course. What is your name, my pretty one?"

"Dorgie Ebbens," was the answer promptly given.

"There, what can be more decisive?—Georgie Evans. And Georgie has a guinea-pig and a blind grandfather at home, and a strong father who works down in the pits, and brings home money for Georgie and his mother."

There was a curious three-cornered piece of garden in front of the little inn, and I had had our refreshments spread in an arbour ingeniously formed of trained apple trees, on which the fruit was reddening. A few marigolds, some bushes of grey and golden-eyed Michaelmas daisies, and one red rose tree covered with blossoms, made up the glory of that garden, but I have never seen any flowers like them since. The lady ate with simple relish. The simplicity of a child was in her words and manner; everything seemed harmonious and beautiful to her, and filled for me with a joy which was past understanding. A half-blind and wholly lame cur crept to her feet: she fed it and patted it with her gentle hand; and I said—

"That is probably the first pat of kindly interest that wretched brute has ever had. It is an ill-favoured cur."

"Perhaps if it had had more friends it would not look so ill-favoured. At any rate, it needs all the more friends now. See how hungry the poor thing is." She gathered some of the remains of our meal and put them down before the dog, and then turned to me eagerly. "I must press on—it gets late; we have still six miles or so. It will be pleasanter walking now—but need I take you further? Surely you ought to turn back now."

"No; I will not turn, thank you. I will take the train from Llanfurdy."

I said the words with outward calm, and they covered a great tumult within. Was it nothing to her that we had met? Was her kindness, her sympathy for me, only that which she felt for the many? For a moment the thought checked my admiration for universal love. I wanted something for myself alone. I knew, as I recognized the pain which struck to my heart, and the necessity for self-defence which promoted my answer, that I loved.

We laughed over our modest bill together, and again took our road. We had to pass by the copse where the children were blackberrying. I remember to this moment how the afternoon light was touching the hills, which were steeper and more rugged in this part as we began to ascend again. We left the little village behind us bathed in sunshine. For some time as we mounted the path we could hear the sound of the stream flowing over the large round stones which formed its bed. We came to a turn in the road which would hide the distant view, and here we lingered. Again there came on her face that wondrous look of sympathetic recognition.

"We cannot let our love of beauty go," I said, going back to our former conversation.

"Yes, we can," she said,— "not our love of it in the abstract, but our ideals of beauty can be let go ; they can change more than anything else. What is completely beautiful to me to-day, may be merged in higher beauty to-morrow. More still, what is ugly to me to-day may some day take its place in my ideal of beauty."

And then she was silent, gazing until her eyes grew dim at the scene of peace at her feet, the

white village, the stream with the mossy stones and green copse growth scattered along its banks, the bright cornfields in the valley, the golden gorse and purple heather on the hills, the softened grey colours of the crags, and the far-away blue of the sea.

"Peace!" she said softly; and then I fancied for one moment that a shadow of anguish seemed to cross her face and that she whispered some name to herself; but I put the thought away as a fancy when she turned to me with a smile, saying, "We must not look at any other view: this must be the last, the very last; the night will be overtaking us."

We walked on. The road lay round a precipitous piece of rock, above an unused quarry. On our left hand was the copse, from which the voices of the children came in merry clamour. On our right a narrow belt of bramble and gorse bushes hid the edge of a rocky steep.

"What is that bright thing moving among the bramble bushes on our right?" said the lady. "It must be one of the children apart from the others, looking for treasures for itself. Look!" she said, pointing towards it; and then she cried

again, "Look!" but now it was with a sharp note of terror in her voice as she sprang forward.

I saw in a moment what had happened. The little straying child had gone perilously near the precipitous side, and in reaching over for some blackberries had fallen.

A little way below the edge was a tuft of earth and grass, with a bramble bush growing on it.

The tiny, childish hand clutched at the bush to save it from the abyss below, and the boy hung suspended.

The lady did not hesitate ; the child must be reached. She sprang on to the ledge. I could see the danger. The ledge of loose earth and bramble bushes, which was just strong enough to bear little Georgie's weight, began to loosen visibly and to detach itself when the lady's greater weight was added. But she had seized the little child and swung him to me, the very effort of doing so increasing her own danger. As she saw the child in my arms, she looked up into my face for one moment with the supreme joy of a saviour. I cried out in bitter anguish,

as I saw the fissure widening and heard the rattle of the loosened stones and earth.

"Try to reach my hand," I said, leaning over as far as I could.

Merciful God ! if it had but held for one moment more, only for one. She made a spring to touch my hand. It was too late ; the loosened mound had detached itself. With a crash it fell, and I knew rather than saw that she was with it.

Little Georgie's terrified sobs had brought the other children from the copse. I do not know how I sent them for help, nor how I clambered down the steep, but I was quickly by her side. She had fallen free of most of the *débris*, and was alive and conscious a moment after I reached her—but she was dying.

"Quick ! quick !" she whispered. "Listen, kind friend ; I want your help. Death is coming. The box ?"

"It is safe above," I said, as one in a dream.

"Can you be strong ?"

"Yes, if you want me."

"Leave me here—go on with the box to Llanfurdy. It will make two people happy—him—and another, my sister !"

"You must be helped first."

"No, no ; it will be over with me. The living,—help the living. Go to Llanfurdy Hall. Ask for Alan Morgan ; give the box to him. The papers are in it. The key is here. Cut it off from round my neck. Tell him—tel' him—— No, my father is there ; tell him that. I say Alan must marry Nellie. These are the papers he requires to see, and Alan starts for India to-morrow. Can you go ? Can you remember ? He starts to-morrow—to-morrow !"

A deadly faintness seemed coming over her. I raised her a little.

"I have sent for help," I whispered. "Oh, live till it comes ! You may be saved—when you have escaped with life from such a fall."

"No, no ; death comes !" She looked up at me with the same calm smile I had first noticed, though it flickered now. "I only lived to tell you. I thank God for sending you to me to-day."

That was my life's guerdon. No words like those had ever come into my past life ; no words like them can now ever touch my future.

"You saved little Georgie ; he was safe in his sister's arms," I said.

"Poor Georgie ! that is best. His life is more than mine now ; he may do more than I could ever do. And yet—and yet—it seems all right now, whether we strive and bring our failure, or whether we bring success."

"Oh, live ! live !" I cried to her once out of my agony—"live for me." Then, ashamed of my selfish thought at such a time, I longed to unsay my words.

She looked at me with pity, divine in its tenderness, and as free from individualism as divinity itself ; but the grey shadow was already stealing over her.

"Hush ! I have done with it all."

The stillness of death had fallen around us two—us two. The gift life could not give, death tossed to me in scorn.

"Are you afraid ?" I asked, as I felt her shudder.

"No. I thought once I should be, but I feel no fear. I do not know what is coming ; but I have loved, and I go to the Love itself."

I hid my face. When I looked again her

eyes were fixed in that gaze which sees whatever it is that death has to reveal.

"You will go?"

"I will go," I said solemnly.

"Do you know the way? Don't miss it! You must cross the river!"

"Yes."

"Good-bye, brother." Again the shuddering seized her. Then with one convulsive effort she threw out her hands, and cried, "Alan! Alan! save me!"

There was a minute or two of agony, then followed calm. The sounds of the river near us and the distant voices of those who were coming to our aid were the last she heard. As the sun went down, she whispered, "Peace! all is God." Her eyes wandered to the distance for a moment. "Isn't it a beautiful way across the hills?" I heard her saying dreamily—and then I knelt beside the dead.

Help came at last. The pitmen returning from their work had heard the story. The lady who had saved the village pet, the golden-haired Georgie, seemed a saint to them. They lifted their caps from their heads as they touched

her. One of them who was not needed for carrying her, picked from the rocks a bunch of white campion and laid it in her dead hands. They looked at me kindly and pityingly, not knowing I had known her but one day. For one day? But had it not been the one only day on which I had lived? I had a right to their pity if pain could give it.

It was Georgie's mother who met us at the door of the little inn where we had been so happy before, and where we now laid the dead lady down. She seemed to have a right to fold those beautiful hands to their rest—the hands which had saved her boy.

I moved as in a dream, but my one overmastering feeling was, that the lady's work must be done. When I had knelt by the dead alone and had prayed the prayer which as a child I had prayed at my mother's knee, I had her errand still to do. I asked directions for the road, and taking up the box, refused all offers of company and set off on my way.

It was getting late in the evening now, but my one longing was for night and loneliness. I seemed to feel no fatigue, and I was so possessed

with my errand, that the shock of what had happened seemed hardly to find place in my brain. I tried not to think of how we two had gone up the hill together. I tried to forget where we had turned to look at the view, and how she had said, "This must be the last, the very last; the night will overtake us." And the night had overtaken her—nay, rather, the eternal day had found her!

I resolutely turned my eyes from the fatal spot, and from thence onwards the road was new.

There was a strange calm upon me. I could recall every moment of the wonderful day, and yet it had changed all my life. The shadows were deepening; but I hardly noticed them, for my road was at present straight and direct, till a wild shriek of wind whistling round the crags told that a storm was near. A reverberating peal of thunder shook the hills a moment after. Then flash after flash of lightning lit up the dark outlines of the hills among which the thunder was crashing. The rain fell with great violence. I was so afraid that the box and its contents might suffer, that for a few moments I remained

under the shelter of a rock. It was at a spot where two roads met, and I was in difficulties which to take, when a brilliant flash of lightning suddenly showed me for a moment the figure of a wayfarer taking the road to the right. It was a woman. "What an evening for her to be out!" I said to myself; and then I lifted up my voice in the storm and cried out to her. But she took no notice.

"I will follow her," I said. "If she can face this storm I can."

I had taken off a light mackintosh overcoat which I wore, and fastened up the box in it, so that it could receive no harm from the rain, and then I followed the solitary wayfarer.

Quickly as I walked I was unable to overtake her, but I was able to gather from various landmarks that I was in the right road, and I persevered in it till I came to the river which the lady had told me I should have to cross. To my dismay as I reached it, I saw the ruins of a footbridge being washed helplessly up and down in the water. The stream was swollen by several thunderstorms, and seemed altogether too deep and rapid for fording at this place. It

was all strange to me. How was I to cross? The evening light, which was fast waning, was uncertain and indefinite. To my great surprise, the solitary foot-passenger paused by the edge of the stream, then swiftly turned to the left hand, and walked along a narrow path among the reeds and rushes by the side of the water. I followed, feeling sure that this showed some knowledge of the place, and that she was probably acquainted with some other ford.

The storm had gone to some distance and was echoing from rock to rock behind me with a dull, sullen boom like spent anger. There was a rift in the clouds above me, and a pale yellow light shone in the west and was reflected in the river. The hills loomed out grandly purple in twilight against the clearing sky.

The woman sped on over the narrow path beside the rapid swollen stream, between the river sedges, the yellow ragwort, and crimson willow herb. At last she paused, and I was able to come up to her.

“Can you tell me——” I began; and then an indefinable awe crept over me and I found myself trembling. When I attempted to speak

again my tongue refused to move, for the shadowy figure turned its face to me—and it was the face of the lady who was dead. She pointed slowly across the stream, and I saw that in this spot there were large stepping-stones which she seemed to bid me cross ; but she then passed on swiftly among the reeds and the willow herb into the twilight gloom.

I did not doubt, in the inspiration of that hour, she had come to show me how I might perform her errand. I hardly know whether I doubt it now.

I watched her until she faded in the gloom, then I crossed the river, and went up the road on the other side as I had been directed. About two miles further on I came in sight of the turrets of Llanfurdy Hall. It stood on a hill. There was a broad terrace in front of it on which the windows opened. A sloping lawn studded with trees and shrubs sloped from it to the road in which I was walking.

I saw a pleasant footpath across the lawn, and turned into it gladly. To my consternation, I found that instead of leading either to the back door or the front, it came out on the terrace

exactly under one of the large windows which was open. The lights were lit inside. Two gentlemen were sitting by the open window smoking. As I drew near I was hidden by the deep shadow, and their voices, raised in altercation, reached me clearly through the still evening air. I was unable to reach any door without being detected, and was thus obliged to be an unwilling listener to what was being said. The elder man was speaking vehemently.

"You see, the promised proofs of your innocence have not come to hand. I must adhere to my word, and refuse consent till they do."

"I cannot understand it," rejoined the younger man. "Your elder daughter promised they should be here by this time. She loved her sister Nellie, and she knew that her happiness was bound up in mine."

"But you will see that I cannot allow you to be engaged to my child while a shade of suspicion lies upon your character."

"I can see; and were it not for the certainty of those proofs I should despair. Hush! sir. Did you not hear a step?"

"I cannot say that I did; after a storm there

are so many unusual sounds. But she will not come now. No! My good Alan, take my advice, forget this child of mine, go out to India, and live it down."

Alan Morgan shook his head sadly as he turned his face to the window, straining his sight through the gathering darkness. Suddenly his face lit up with a glow of hope. "Sir, there is your eldest daughter crossing the terrace. I can see her distinctly. Look! She paused a moment and gazed at us; now she is walking away."

"I see nothing," said the old man coldly.

And then I came out from the shadow, and while Alan's eyes were still following the figure which he had seen, I stood before them. "Gentlemen," I said, striving to speak calmly, "I have brought this box at the request of the lady you are speaking of—for she is dead."

POSTSCRIPT.

HE is dead now, and nothing that we say can touch him. I had often wondered what the inspiration of his life had been, for that some-

thing special had aroused in him that deep enthusiasm of humanity which ruled his later years I could not doubt. His life appeared to be that of a man who had seen a vision, and evermore lived as if the vision were the truth. His face was lit with a love of his kind that I have never seen in any other. I do not believe there was one of his fellow-creatures with whom he could not find some bond of sympathy. He had ready help for every human claim. When he died, eulogies were written on him. The blank he left was felt by the highest minds in our land. But the poor, the outcasts, and the friendless wrote no eulogies on him ; they had simply learned from him how to live purer and nobler lives than they had done before, and they lived them.

He left me all his unpublished papers, and among others I found this, which has, I think, given me the clue to the history of his last years.

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